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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT, INR/NESA; NSC FOR E.
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SUBJECT: PEACE PROCESS UPDATE: LTTE NEGOTIATOR SPEAKS
OUT; UN SYG ANNAN TO VISIT; FEDERALISM EXPLORED

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 01/13/03 fax

- (B) Colombo 52, and previous (NOTAL)

(U) CLASSIFIED BY LEWIS AMSELEM, DEPUTY CHIEF OF
MISSION. REASONS 1.5 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (C) This update of Sri Lanka's peace process reviews
the following:

-- LTTE negotiator Balasingham speaks out

-- Norwegian Prime Minister responds to president's
charges

-- Kofi Annan to visit in February; Japanese Special
Envoy Akashi also on the way

-- Exploring federalism

LTTE NEGOTIATOR SPEAKS OUT

[1](#)2. (SBU) Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) senior
negotiator Anton Balasingham has received widespread
press coverage in Sri Lanka of late. The coverage has
been generated by his remarks at the press conference
that took place after the completion of the fourth round
of talks last week and in two press interviews, one with
the BBC and one with a local paper. Overall,
Balasingham used the three occasions to emphasize the
LTTE's commitment to the ongoing peace process. On a
more negative note, he also went on to stress that the
LTTE would not consider disarming until much further
down the road. Highlights of Balasingham's comments
included:

-- BBC TV interview (telecast on January 7): During
this interview with BBC Sri Lanka correspondent Frances
Harrison, Balasingham underscored that he did not
believe that the war would return because "both parties
are seriously committed to peace." In response to a
question, he stressed that the Tigers had no intention
of disbanding the "Black Tiger" suicide squads at this
time, stating: "All LTTE units are now observing the
ceasefire, but they are also the bargaining power of the
Tamil people. We have to keep them to pressurize the
government to bring about a settlement. When this
situation is reached, then we will consider disarming
these units."

-- (After-the-talks) press conference (January 9): When
queried once again on the issue of disarmament,
Balasingham replied: "Some people are under the
impression that we are like the IRA or some other
organization which has a few weapons lying here or
there. That is wrong. The LTTE has a formidable
military machine, a conventional army that has fought
this war for 20 years...we will not disarm, until the
aspirations of the Tamil people are met. (Until this
happens) disarming would be suicidal." Balasingham went
on to deny that the Tigers were holding any Sri Lankan
military POWs or that there were any MIAs, stating
"Unfortunately, they (the Sri Lankan soldiers) all died
on the battlefield." He estimated that 25,000 GSL
soldiers were killed in the war along with 17,500 LTTE
cadre.

-- Interview in the SUNDAY LEADER (published
January 12): During this interview with editor Lasantha
Wickremetunge, Balasingham underscored that the LTTE
wanted to see progress made in solving the issue of the
Sri Lankan military's "high security zones" in Jaffna.
The LTTE was not demanding that the GSL withdraw from
all of these security zones, but it wanted them
relocated or reduced in size. In any case, the LTTE had
no intention to move heavy weapons into any areas that
were eventually vacated by the military. He asserted
that the military -- as opposed to Prime Minister
Wickremesinghe's government -- was being "rigid" on the
security zone matter. In response to a question, he hit

out at President Kumaratunga, asserting that the LTTE could not work with her, remarking: "If she (Kumaratunga) takes power (by regaining control of the government), I don't think there will be any peace negotiations because she is committed to war." (Note: the text of this interview is contained in Ref A.)

13. (C) COMMENT: Although he is technically spokesman of the LTTE (among many other titles), Balasingham -- befitting an organization that remains highly secretive -- does not interact with the press all that much. His latest comments, particularly those published in the SUNDAY LEADER, were some of the most extensive a LTTE official has made since the peace process began, however. (Note: His appearance with LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran at a press conference in April 2001 was also a major media event.) In general via his comments, Balasingham appeared to be trying to seem moderate and to assure the south of the LTTE's commitment to peace. That said, his obvious attempts to divide the south into elements the LTTE can work with (e.g., the GSL) and those it cannot work with (e.g., Kumaratunga/the military) were a bit unsettling and probably too clever by half. END COMMENT.

NORWEGIAN PM RESPONDS

14. (C) Norwegian Prime Minister Bondevik has responded to President Kumaratunga's complaints about GoN involvement in a recent incident involving the import of radio equipment for the LTTE. (Note: On January 1, Kumaratunga sent Bondevik a letter questioning the Norwegian role in this matter, especially the involvement of Ambassador Jon Westborg -- see Ref B.) In a letter dated January 6 that received front-page coverage in the local press, the Norwegian PM noted that the GSL had already explained the circumstances surrounding the import of the equipment and that the GoN did not have anything else to add to this explanation. (Note: PM Wickremesinghe recently sent Kumaratunga an extensive letter explaining GSL involvement in the matter, noting that the Norwegian embassy had only gotten involved at the specific request of the GSL.) Ambassador Westborg was open to briefing the president on the matter if she wished, Bondevik noted. The letter went on to praise Kumaratunga's involvement in initiating and supporting the peace process. Asked about the letter, Oddvar Laegried, DCM at the Norwegian Embassy, told us that the letter was carefully calibrated not to anger Kumaratunga and Norway hoped she would put the matter behind her.

15. (C) COMMENT: It is possible that the controversy over the radio equipment will come to a close with this missive from Prime Minister Bondevik. The letter was drafted with the utmost care and seemed to hit all the right notes, especially in its salutes to Kumaratunga's (rather large) ego. In the meantime, anti-peace process elements -- and those who are merely skeptical like the president -- seem to have wrung just about every last bit of blood they can out of this matter. In the process, they seem to have scored some points on the government and the GoN -- but not too many. END COMMENT.

UN SYG, GOJ SPECIAL ENVOY TO VISIT

16. (U) The Sri Lankan MFA has announced that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan will visit Sri Lanka from

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February 26-27. According to UN sources, the focus of the visit will be Sri Lanka's peace process, and ways to address the humanitarian situation in the north and east. While plans for the visit are still being put together, it will center around meetings with GSL officials in Colombo. It is also possible that a visit to war-ravaged Jaffna will be arranged.

17. (SBU) In another visit related to the peace process, Japan's Special Envoy for Sri Lankan peace process humanitarian issues Yasushi Akashi plans to visit, January 15-20. The primary reason for the visit, according to Koji Yagi, a poloff at the Japanese Embassy, is for Akashi to attend the "Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs" (SIHRN) meeting being held in the LTTE-controlled Wanni region. (Note: Akashi is acting as principal advisor to the sub-committee, which was formed at the second round of GSL-LTTE talks in November.) According to press reports, Akashi may meet with LTTE leader Prabhakaran during his stop in the Wanni, but Yagi said he did not think that Akashi would be participating in any such meeting. Akashi is also planning to visit sites in

southern Sri Lanka. (Note: Akashi is scheduled to meet Ambassador Wills on January 17.)

18. (C) COMMENT: Annan's visit will be the first by a UN SYG since U Thant's in 1967. With the GSL's peace initiative now over a year old, Annan clearly wants to try to reinforce the process to the full extent possible. It will be interesting to see who in the LTTE he might meet with, if anyone. As for Akashi, as mentioned in Ref B, Japan has been trying to play a more important role in Sri Lanka's peace process for some time. FM Kawaguchi's recent visit to Sri Lanka fit into that mold, as does Akashi's involvement. END COMMENT.

EXPLORING FEDERALISM

19. (U) In an effort to increase understanding of federalist models of government, a German NGO called "PeaceTalk" has invited ten Sri Lankans on a ten-day tour of Italy, Austria, Germany, and Belgium. (Note: Mission is trying to find out more information about this NGO.) Representatives of most major parties in the south, including the governing United National Party and the opposition People's Alliance, are reportedly slated to participate in the study, as is the LTTE. The radical, Sinhalese extremist Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has reportedly turned down an invitation to participate. Gajan Ponnambalam, a Tamil National Alliance MP who plans to join the study tour, told us that the primary focus of the trip would be ways to apply federalist models to the Sri Lankan situation.

110. (SBU) COMMENT: Once extremely controversial, federalism is now clearly a growth business in Sri Lanka. Since the LTTE announced at the third round of talks in December that it was willing to explore federalist options, numerous NGOs have offered to work with the two sides in developing ideas on this issue. (Note: Essentially the issue under discussion is the Sri Lankan constitution, which is unitary in structure, and would need to be revamped or rewritten to allow some sort of federalist structure to emerge.) The study tour to Europe is part of this general educational effort, as was a conference held in December in Switzerland sponsored by a Swiss NGO. We also understand that at the recently concluded fourth round of talks there were many meetings on the margins on this topic, including some involving the Forum of Federations, a Canadian NGO. END COMMENT.

111. (U) Minimize considered.
WILLS